

Interview with Laurel J. Brinton

Journal of English Linguistics

2024, Vol. 52(4) 346–362

© The Author(s) 2024



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00754242241291663

journals.sagepub.com/home/eng**Merja Kytö**¹ 

Laurel J. Brinton is Professor Emerita at the Department of English Language and Literatures at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada. She specializes in English historical and contemporary linguistics with her particular areas of interest within historical pragmatics, historical discourse analysis, grammaticalization, lexicalization, corpus linguistics, and aspectual studies. Her empirical investigations cover a wide range of linguistic features and constructions in Modern English grammar and the history of English, among them pragmatic markers, phrasal verbs, composite predicates, and comment clauses. After completing her PhD at the University of California, Berkeley in English with a Linguistics Emphasis in 1981, she worked at UBC until her retirement. She is currently the co-editor of *English Language and Linguistics* (Cambridge University Press), together with Bernd Kortmann (University of Freiburg), Warren McGuire (University of Edinburgh), and Nuria Yáñez-Bouza (University of Vigo).

Laurel Brinton has published extensively in the form of monographs, collected volumes, book chapters, and articles in leading journals in the field. After publishing her PhD thesis as *The development of English aspectual systems: Aspectualizers and post-verbal particles* (Cambridge University Press, 1988a), her foundational study on *Pragmatic markers in English: Grammaticalization and discourse functions* (Mouton de Gruyter) came out in 1996. She broadened her discussion to cover comment clauses in *The comment clause in English: Syntactic origins and pragmatic development* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) and returned to pragmatic markers in *The evolution of pragmatic markers in English: Pathways of change* (Cambridge University Press, 2017b). She pursued language-theoretical issues in historical pragmatics in her recent *Pragmatics in the history of English* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). The broader context of grammaticalization and lexicalization were in focus in *Lexicalization and language change*, co-authored with Elizabeth Closs Traugott (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Laurel Brinton has also contributed to the field by editing

¹Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Corresponding Author:

Merja Kytö, Uppsala University, Box 527, Uppsala 751 20, Sweden.

Email: merja.kyto@engelska.uu.se

comprehensive volumes on English historical linguistics, among them *English historical linguistics: An international handbook*, co-edited with Alexander Bergs (De Gruyter Mouton, 2012; reprinted as five readers in 2017) and *English historical linguistics: Approaches and perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2017a). Her *Collocational and idiomatic aspects of composite predicates in the history of English*, co-edited with Minoji Akimoto (Benjamins, 1999), has also proved an important springboard for subsequent work on the topic.

Teaching, pedagogical aspirations, and developing teaching materials have been close to Laurel Brinton's heart through her time at UBC. Among other things, together with Leslie K. Arnovick, her colleague at the department, she published *The English language: A linguistic history*, now in its 3rd edition (Oxford University Press, 2016). In this book the linguistic origins and the socio-cultural contexts of the English language are discussed and sample texts provided from its main historical periods. A treatment of modern English appeared in her *The structure of modern English: A linguistic introduction* (John Benjamins 2000; later revised as Brinton & Brinton 2010).

The following interview was conducted via Zoom and in person in April and June 2024. The text has been edited.

MK: What experiences did you have in university which led you down the academic path you eventually took?

LB: Well, I'll go back to my undergraduate days when I was an English literature major. One summer I happened to take a course in English grammar, and the professor said, "Congratulations, you've signed up for the most boring course this summer." But I found it a fascinating course, I loved it! So I went on to take his history of English class the next year, and enjoyed that as well. At my university we had breadth requirements, so we had to complete courses in social sciences and sciences as well as in humanities. I had done a lot of sciences (because I was my father's last hope for a chemist), but I hadn't taken any social sciences.

Linguistics counted as a social science, so in my last year of university, I took phonology and morphology courses and really discovered linguistics. When I applied to graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley, I read that they had an English Language program. When I went to see the advisor for the first time, I mentioned I might be interested in this program and he sent me immediately to the person in charge of the program, Julian Boyd, who later became my thesis supervisor. I took Old English in the first term at graduate school with Alain Renoir, who was an Old English literature specialist, and he called me in after the final exam and said, "I think you have a talent in this discipline." He listed a whole series of courses that I had to take, including Old High German, Old Norse, and Proto-Indo-European, and I took all of them, actually, except for ancient Greek. So it was the English Language program at Berkeley that got me started in my career.

Berkeley at that time was, and still is of course, a wonderful place to study linguistics; for example, Charles Fillmore and George Lakoff were at the Linguistics department and John Searle was at the Philosophy department. I

took the older Germanic languages from Herbert Penzl, who was just about to retire. There were separate Scandinavian and Celtic Studies departments as well as the Linguistics department. So it was a really rich environment to study and I was very fortunate to be there.

MK: That was fascinating! I particularly liked the part where you discovered linguistics.

LB: Yes, I was studying English literature and enjoying it, but I was just getting a bit tired of literary criticism. I really needed something more: the English grammar course in the summer was a comparison of traditional, structural, and generative grammar, and it was really very interesting for me.

MK: That explains the multi-faceted interest you have had in language and linguistics in your research. I am sure that little by little the topic of your PhD dissertation came up, so how did you come to write a dissertation on aspect/*Aktionsart*? And how did you come to take a diachronic focus?

LB: Julian Boyd was a specialist in English modals, but I wasn't sure I wanted to work on modals—it felt too difficult. I was looking around for a thesis topic. I don't quite know how this came about but I was tutoring a woman who had an amateur (non-academic) interest in language, and she got fascinated with what in my dissertation and in my 1988 book (Brinton 1988a) I call “aspectual catenatives” like *begin*, *continue*, and *stop*. So I was talking to her about these, and I thought this could be an interesting dissertation topic. The original plan was to write a synchronic dissertation actually. At Berkeley you wrote your “prospectus” for your dissertation and had a “prospectus exam,” so I went through all of that, and I was just about ready to begin. But at a social gathering (the “Saga Club” where we met monthly to read Old Norse sagas and drink and eat, of course), a graduate student in linguistics told me about a book that he had seen that had just come out—Freed's (1979) *The semantics of English aspectual complementation*, which treated this topic—so I panicked. I thought: I can't do this topic because it has been dealt with! I then changed my orientation to a diachronic dissertation, which was easily done because I had been studying all the older Germanic languages (Old English, Old Norse, Old High German), and Latin and had the background to do that.

MK: If we now move on from there and think about the various research angles out there, was it already then that you thought about working on grammaticalization?

LB: I don't have a recollection of where I first encountered grammaticalization—it was definitely “in the air” in Berkeley and Stanford at the time (1975-1981, my graduate school days), especially with Elizabeth Closs Traugott at Stanford. The work of Bernd Heine was especially influential as I studied grammaticalization (for instance Heine, Claudi & Hünnemeyer 1991), as was, of course, the work of Lehmann (1982, 1985).

Traugott was focusing on the semantic and pragmatic aspects of grammaticalization in contrast to the usual focus on morphosyntactic change. Both of us were uncomfortable with the notion of “bleaching,” or “desemanticization,” as the sole explanation for semantic change in grammaticalization. We also felt

that although metaphor was an important motivation, it was not the exclusive explanation. We somewhat simultaneously began suggesting that the notion of “metonymic change” might be a better way to understand some of the changes seen in grammaticalization (as did also Heine, Claudi & Hünnemeyer 1991).

Traugott (1982) had adapted the Hallidayan model of propositional > textual > interpersonal to explain semantic-pragmatic change and the directionality of change in grammaticalization. She was also interested in the role played by (inter)subjectivization in grammaticalization (Traugott 1989). And she was developing her model involving “pragmatic strengthening” or the conventionalization of conversational implicature in semantic-pragmatic change (Traugott 1988; developed fully in Traugott & Dasher 2002). Elizabeth Traugott’s work was thus a critical basis for my own grammaticalization studies.

MK: You were also among the first to approach pragmatic or discourse markers from an historical perspective. How did you come to work on this topic?

LB: This I can date more precisely. When I was a graduate student at Berkeley, we had a student-run group called the Old English Colloquium. (This was very active in hosting speakers, small conferences, and so on). I first gave a paper there in 1980 entitled “*What ho, lo, list, yes, indeed: Finding a translation of Beowulf for the freshman*” (Brinton 1980). The first part of that title refers to the way *hwæt* ‘what’ is translated in various Modern English translations of *Beowulf*. This provided the germ of the idea about *hwæt*. In 1988 I presented another paper to the same group entitled “*Y’know what?: Hwæt as a discourse marker in Old English*” (Brinton 1988b).

All of these ideas about discourse markers in the history of English were percolating in the late 1980s and can be seen as stemming in large part from one little word that had figured in my work on aspect, namely *gan* ‘began.’ In 1987 I had given a paper at the 5th International Conference on English Historical Linguistics (ICEHL) in Cambridge (my first international, non-North American conference) entitled “The stylistic function of ME *gan* reconsidered” (Brinton 1990). So both Middle English *gan* and Old English *hwæt* were really significant in making me think about discourse markers historically. At the conference in Cambridge I remember meeting Brita Wårvik, who along with her teacher Nils Erik Enkvist, was working on *þa* ‘then’ in Old English. This set me on a path looking for different types of historical discourse markers. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, I presented a series of papers on discourse markers.

Obviously, work on discourse markers in Present-Day English formed the groundwork for my historical work, especially Schiffrin’s (1987) seminal work *Discourse markers*, published in 1987. Also important were Karin Aijmer’s meticulous corpus studies (e.g., Aijmer 1987), Östman’s (1981) monograph on *you know*, and Fraser’s (1986, 1988) work on “pragmatic formatives.” So a lot of work was being done on synchronic discourse markers, and people were starting to think about historical discourse markers. I joined in and expanded this focus to a number of different discourse markers in the history of

English. This work culminated in my 1996 book *Pragmatic markers in English: Grammaticalization and discourse functions* (Brinton 1996b).

MK: And wasn't this synchronic work mostly on spoken language?

LB: Yes, it was mostly on spoken language, like Karin Aijmer's work with spoken corpora. And of course, there was the view that you couldn't study historical discourse markers because (i) there wasn't spoken data available, and (ii) even if we had transcriptions of spoken data, features like discourse markers would have been edited out. This is all part of the "bad data" problem that people started to talk about, but then later many began to realize that this wasn't really such a problem because, as you know, there is speech-based data of various kinds, especially from at least Early Modern English onward, even some from Middle English. At the beginning I really didn't think about the bad data problem very much; it was only something that came up later.

MK: But your work was highly seminal for the rise and consolidation of historical pragmatics. So again, you somehow, without knowing it, contributed importantly to the field.

LB: Yes, it was interesting that my book came out in 1996 and Andreas Jucker's collected volume *Historical pragmatics* came out in 1995. It was really a happy coincidence that the two books came out so close together, and really sparked interest in the field and helped establish it in various ways.

My work on historical discourse markers was expanded to work on clausal pragmatic markers: *The comment clause in English: Syntactic origins and pragmatic development* (Brinton 2008), and it all came together in *The evolution of pragmatic markers in English: Pathways of change* (Brinton 2017b), where I collected together some older, less readily available studies (updated by use of electronic corpora) and included some new studies.

MK: So how did you come to work with electronic corpora?

LB: Younger readers may be interested to know that all of my early work (such as my 1996 book) was done without the benefit of electronic corpora—using concordances (of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Malory) and secondary sources (German theses from the nineteenth and early twentieth century were often goldmines)—as well as just plain hard work manually collecting and counting examples.

And it is impossible to underestimate how invaluable Visser's (1969-1973) *An historical syntax of the English language* was to my work, as was Mustanoja's (1960) *A Middle English syntax* and Mitchell's (1985) *Old English syntax* and of course historical dictionaries: *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Bosworth 1898), the *Middle English Dictionary* (still in progress then and in print form only; Lewis et al. 1952-2001), the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989, also in print form until the 2nd edition came out on CD-ROM in 1992). There was a microfiche concordance of Old English (Venezky & Healey 1980)—which was not very user-friendly!—and the *Dictionary of Old English* beginning with the letter "D" in 1986 (Healey et al. 2018).

But then I began hearing about the new resource for studying the history of English being prepared in Helsinki, namely the Helsinki Corpus of English

Texts (1991) (Rissanen et al. 1991). I attended the 6th ICEHL in Helsinki in 1990 and went beforehand to work with the corpus prior to its publication in 1991. You, Merja, were very helpful and kind to me, directing me in collecting data (I think my first data related to *have* + past participle structures, which was the topic of the paper I gave at the conference—this paper was never published but is on my website <https://blogs.ubc.ca/laurelbrinton/on-line-papers/>). So that was my first encounter with the Helsinki Corpus and from there on my work with corpora just took off.

I then purchased—at rather great expense—a CD-ROM from ICAME containing the Helsinki Corpus, I think in 1999 (also included were a variety of other corpora, such as the Brown and Frown corpora, the LOB and FLOB corpora, the Lampeter Corpus, the Innsbruck Corpus, and others). We used WordCruncher, a now archaic (and rather clunky) search program that you will remember, Merja. There were nothing like online corpora yet but these were to come. Now, of course, we can get the Helsinki Corpus online too; though small by today's standards, it remains invaluable.

MK: So was it when working on corpora that the idea of looking at composite predicates came to your mind?

LB: No, actually that came about because I had a visiting scholar, Minoji Akimoto (from Aoyama Gakuin University in Japan), who came to me in 1997-1998 with a group of articles on composite predicates by Japanese scholars. My interest in phrasal verbs (stemming from my original work on aspect in my dissertation) had led me to be interested in composite predicates. I had given a paper on *take a look* and *look up* in 1991 (published in this journal as Brinton 1996a). So it was a natural extension of my work on phrasal verbs to look at composite predicates. We thought to solicit a few articles by western scholars (Elizabeth Traugott, Risto Hiltunen, you), and this resulted in an edited volume (Brinton & Akimoto 1999).

Composite predicates would later figure in my work on questions of lexicalization versus grammaticalization. According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985:1530), with composite predicates there is a “gradience between grammar and lexicon, including a gradience in lexicalization,” and Algeo (1995:203) sees composite predicates as falling “[S]omewhere near the middle of the magnetic field of language . . . where grammar and lexis meet.” In this vein, I contributed a section on composite predicates to the lexicalization book (Brinton & Traugott 2005) and to *The Oxford handbook of grammaticalization* (Brinton 2011).

MK: So you already mentioned lexicalization as one of your areas, and I remember hearing a plenary of yours at a conference where you went very deep in the language-theoretical aspects of this mechanism of change. Do you remember that plenary?

LB: Yes, it was in 2000, when I gave a keynote address at the 11th ICEHL in Santiago entitled “Grammaticalization versus lexicalization reconsidered: On the late use of temporal adverbs” (Brinton 2002). I was talking about uses such as “my late husband,” and after that plenary, I was approached by Elizabeth

Traugott, who said that she had been thinking about many of the same issues. She wondered whether I would be interested in writing a monograph with her. We proceeded to do this over the next few years, resulting in *Lexicalization and language change* (Brinton & Traugott 2005). Actually, the book is a consideration not only of what lexicalization is—the literature is quite unclear about how to define lexicalization—but also of the relationship between grammaticalization and lexicalization. But the publisher thought that our original title, which included both the terms “grammaticalization” and “lexicalization” was too much of a mouthful, so “grammaticalization” got excised. Of course, a reviewer (Lenker 2007:501) immediately pointed out that

[i]t is thus particularly unfortunate that the title of this book does disservice to its contents and is misleading to both buyers and prospective readers in that it does not refer to ‘grammaticalization’, a concept discussed on almost every single page of this book.

MK: So how do you come up with your ideas and topics for study?

LB: Sometimes I can point to clear sources for my ideas, but not always. For example, my work on aspect in English brought up the word *gan*, which has been the subject of considerable scholarly speculation about its function (e.g., metrical filler, dummy tense carrier, ingressive aspect marker, means to allow the infinitive to appear in end position in the verse line, a marker completely devoid of meaning, or a sign of primitive style), that is, it corresponds to what Longacre (1976:468) described as a “mystery particle,” or, “sentential particles” which “defy analysis even at a relatively advanced stage of research” but which invariably can be found “to have a function which relates to a unit larger than the sentence.” Another such mystery particle is Old English *hwaet*, which I originally grappled with when I was thinking about translations of *Beowulf*, as noted above. This word has posed difficulties for translators at the same time as it has caught the attention of literary and linguistic researchers. Both terms thus lead me into the new area of historical discourse markers; while discourse markers were at the time a rich source of study in contemporary discourse analysis, they had been assumed either not to exist in earlier stages of the language or to be unrecoverable from historical records (due to our paucity of speech-based discourse or to the fact that these are forms that would be deleted in the process of transcription).

When it comes to what pragmatic markers I have studied—whether it is *whilom*, *anon*, *what have you*, *whatever*, *I’m just saying*, *you bet*, *is all*, *if you will*, *as it were*, *as if*, *for what it’s worth*, *that said*, and so on—I think this is more a matter of happenstance. Obviously, I am hyper-aware of pragmatic markers I hear in everyday conversation, and I am motivated to study those that puzzle me or intrigue me for some reason: such as the archaic syntax of *what have you*, the prescriptive criticism evoked by *I’m just saying*, *whatever*, or *you bet*,

or the sudden rise in frequency of *that said*. So these forms just sort of circulate in my mind—I keep a list of them, which I return to when I am thinking about paper topics. What I always want to know is how these forms arose and developed pragmatically. Historically, there seems to be one thing that is always true, namely, that present-day pragmatic markers are always older than one might expect. Also, they develop in more complex ways than one might think, sometimes with multiple sources.

MK: So this must mean that you are working more or less all the time and yet never run out of work?

LB: Yes, given the number of pragmatic markers, I'm unlikely to ever run out of work. But I'm sometimes teased about the fact that I write my papers about single words—but they are very interesting words!

MK: What are some of the major works that best represent the scope of your research?

LB: I think that anyone even remotely familiar with my work would see my work on historical pragmatic markers in English as most representative. Google Scholar bears this out by showing my first book on pragmatic markers (1996b) as my most highly cited work. I see this book as setting the groundwork for my two subsequent books on pragmatic markers (Brinton 2008, 2017b). In addition to the three books, I have contributed some substantial handbook articles on pragmatic markers in *The handbook of discourse analysis* (Brinton 2001/2015), in *The handbook of the history of the English language* (Brinton 2006), and in *Historical pragmatics* (Brinton 2010); a chapter is forthcoming in the *New Cambridge history of the English language*, volume 3. My third book on pragmatic markers, *The evolution of pragmatic markers in English: Pathways of change* (Brinton 2017b), was intended as a “career summary” of sorts because it brings together a number of my less accessible publications on pragmatic markers and reevaluates some of my earlier work. Of course, in addition to these books, there are numerous studies of the history of individual pragmatic markers that have appeared in journal articles, conference proceedings, and book chapters; these form a substantial corpus of work on pragmatic markers in the history of English, perhaps more concentrated than any other person's research output I know of. But of course it is not exhaustive; there are always other pragmatic markers to study!

The second-highest cited work on Google Scholar is my co-authored book with Elizabeth Traugott (Brinton & Traugott 2005). This work expands my work on grammaticalization (of pragmatic markers) into the area of lexicalization. It is one of the few monograph-length works on lexicalization and thus has had, I think, a substantial impact. It was translated into Korean, Chinese, and Japanese.

Interestingly, my aspect book (Brinton 1988a, my revised PhD dissertation) is the third most highly cited work according to Google Scholar. This sort of surprises me, but I think this may be due to the fact that it's one of the few works that treats aspect historically in English, and maybe because it has a very complete review of the scholarship, which I think people find useful. Also, of course, it has been around for quite a while.

The fourth most highly rated work on Google Scholar is my structure of English textbook (Brinton 2000; revised as Brinton & Brinton 2010) and I'm not quite sure why that is. But it seems to be cited by a lot of non-native speakers of English who perhaps used it as a textbook and learned from it.

MK: How has your work contributed to research on aspect, grammaticalization, pragmatic markers, and lexicalization?

LB: As noted before, I think my work on **aspect** may be well-cited because it was one of the few books which treats aspect diachronically in English, but it also makes a clear distinction between aspect and Aktionsart (see Smith 1983 on "situation aspect"), talks about the compositional nature of aspect (see Verkuyl 1972), and applies these concepts to both post-verbal particles and verbal catenatives in the history of English. While aspect had been rather sporadically treated in discussions of Old English prefixes, I sought to see its operations as more systematic in the change from prefixes to post-verbal particles and the change from spatial to aspectual/Aktionart meanings. The book also treats the grammaticalization of these forms with a focus on metonymic processes of change.

In respect to **grammaticalization**, I don't see myself as a theoretician of grammaticalization. Rather, I have sought to understand how this process might explain the development of expressions not previously seen as "grammaticalized," that is, pragmatic markers. Although pragmatic markers do not show all of the prototypical changes of grammaticalization, they can be understood as grammatical or grammaticalized if one adopts a wider definition of grammar, as, for example, Diewald (2006, 2011) proposes. Furthermore, I have argued that grammaticalization better explains the changes undergone by pragmatic markers than do other processes like pragmaticalization (e.g., Claridge & Arnovick 2010), lexicalization (e.g., Wischer 2000), or cooptation (Heine, Kaltentböck, Kuteva & Long 2021). My focus on the semantic-pragmatic aspects of grammaticalization is also significant, because I see semantic "attrition" (Lehmann 1985) or "bleaching" as an inadequate way to explain what goes on during the process of grammaticalization; instead, I see the changes from conceptual (referential) to procedural meaning as best explained by "pragmatic strengthening" (Traugott 1988), or change involving the conventionalization of conversational implicatures (see, e.g., Traugott & Dasher 2002).

My 1996 book on the history of **pragmatic markers** in English was the first monograph on the topic, but I was not working in a vacuum. There were other scholars working primarily on *ba* in Old English (Enkvist 1972, 1986; Hopper 1979; Enkvist & Wårvik 1987; Wårvik 1990, 1995). Jucker's (1995) edited volume has a couple of articles on pragmatic markers in the history of English, such as Fludernik (1995) and Wårvik (1995), but that was not yet available to me when I wrote my 1996 book. So, I think that this book can probably be seen as a fairly ground-breaking work, which led to a profusion of articles by many different scholars on pragmatic markers in the history of English. Not only do I treat pragmatic markers in terms of grammaticalization, but I also focus on their syntactic origins and pathways of development (e.g., Brinton 2006).

My work with Elizabeth Traugott on **lexicalization** (also Brinton 2012) sought to provide a clear and unified definition of lexicalization, making sense of the various definitions in the literature and reconciling the views of lexicalization as fusion (syntagm > lexeme, complex > simple lexeme, demorphologization, phonogenesis, idiomatization, demotivation), and lexicalization as increasing autonomy (e.g., decliticization). In the book we define lexicalization as a diachronic change that results in the rise of new lexical/contentful forms, a process typically involving the erasure of phrasal or morphological boundaries, the reduction of phonological sequences, and semantic and pragmatic idiomatization. We look at how lexicalization and grammaticalization compare and contrast, and we also look at degrammaticalization and delexicalization. Lexicalization and grammaticalization both exhibit gradualness, unidirectionality, fusion, coalescence, demotivation, and metaphorization/metonymization, whereas only grammaticalization exhibits decategorialization, bleaching, subjectification, increasing productivity and frequency, and typological generality. Our work also set out the differences between (de)lexicalization and degrammaticalization, processes which are often equated; while degrammaticalization leads from more grammatical to less grammatical, often with increasing autonomy (as in cases of (de)cliticization), delexicalization leads from more lexical to less lexical, often with increasing compositionality (as in cases of folk etymology).

MK: In addition to scholarly writing, there is also another area of writing, that of writing textbooks. How did you come to write textbooks on the structure of English and the history of English? How does textbook writing compare with other types of scholarly writing?

LB: I do think it is very different. I originally worked with my university in writing correspondence courses in both the history of English and the structure of English for students studying remotely. In those days, these were entirely print-based, so you had to have extensive course materials. There was a course manual that was sent out, by mail, to the students. They submitted written assignments, by mail, in return, and then they sat a final exam at various locations in the province. Obviously, with Zoom and other online resources, my university's distance education courses are now entirely different, but these were the old days! Both the course manuals that I wrote served as the initial drafts of my two textbooks.

In conversation with an editor at a Linguistic Society of America meeting, we talked about my producing a textbook on the structure of English. Eventually this was published as *The structure of modern English: A linguistic introduction* (Brinton 2000) in a print book with exercises on a CD-ROM. The text very much follows the organization of my university's year-long course, which was in place before I arrived. This book was revised in 2010 with the help of my sister, Donna M. Brinton, an applied linguist (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/donnambrinton>), as *The linguistic structure of modern English* (Brinton & Brinton 2010). Things had advanced at this stage so that the book of self-testing exercises and answers was now provided online.

My history of English textbook arose out of collaboration with my colleague, Leslie Arnovick, first when we revised the correspondence course. Because the course manual was already a fairly complete draft (UBC offers a year-long history of English course, a rarity in North America), we then discussed publication. We felt the need for an updated history of English textbook with a more linguistic focus than many of the textbooks then available. This led to our textbook, *The English language: A linguistic history* (Brinton & Arnovick 2006), which has undergone two revisions (2011, 2016).

Textbook writing poses unique challenges. Foremost, of course, one wants the text to be accessible and clear to students. When dealing with highly technical issues, this can be quite difficult. Even the prose has to be quite different from the prose in a scholarly article. For example, the first draft of our history of English text was heavily copy-edited to make the prose much less dense. While Leslie and I initially balked at this editing—we both considered ourselves good writers!—we came to see that the edits were often quite helpful. However, I must admit that sometimes I read sentences in the text that simply don't sound like us at all and I wonder where they came from! But, of course, they came from this editing process. In addition to the prose being clear, one wants to think about how to present material (in text, in tables, in figures) in order to be most effective. And what other resources (glossaries, self-testing exercises, websites, etc.) would students appreciate and benefit from? While this thinking is focused on the student, you also have to keep in mind your reviewers, teachers who are going to use the textbook, and other scholars. And it is this dual focus which is perhaps most difficult to balance. What will this other audience think it necessary to include in a textbook on the history of English? Is it necessary, for example, to discuss “breaking” in Old English? If one omits this, will some reviewer call you on it? But overall, the challenges of writing a textbook are counter-balanced by the rewards one receives by using one's own textbook in the classroom and seeing other teachers use it successfully.

MK: You have co-edited the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* and are current co-editor of *English Language and Linguistics*. You have also edited a number of volumes. What appeals to you about editorial work?

LB: I edited the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* for two years before being asked to join the editorial team at *English Language and Linguistics*, where I have served for nine years. Work on the JHP was a real pleasure, as the submissions were central to my area of interest, but often involved languages other than English, and that was very interesting for me. At ELL I am responsible for articles on all historical topics (except phonology) and also fill in for articles on pragmatics and discourse topics (as well as other topics as we try to divide the submissions equitably among the three co-editors). The obvious reward for the work involved in editing a journal is the introduction to new work and new (and older) scholars in the field, as well as the belief that one is serving the discipline in an important way. It also allows me to work with my outstanding co-editors and to keep in touch with a wide range of scholars world-wide. These have been

very pleasant interactions. I think that I have the organizational abilities necessary to help keep a journal running smoothly and the tact required to handle sometimes (very seldom!) difficult authors and reviewers. I also believe that I have the eye for detail that makes me a good editor. I have edited a number of books, including conference volumes, collected papers, a handbook, and a textbook. Editing the massive *English historical linguistics: An international handbook* with Alexander Bergs (Bergs & Brinton 2012) was an especially challenging—and rewarding—activity. For my volume (vol. 1), I worked with over 70 authors, who produced 1000 pages of text. My exposure to ongoing work in the field through this project was, of course, incalculable. I also very much enjoyed editing the textbook, *English historical linguistics: Approaches and perspectives* (Brinton 2017a) as I was able to conceptualize the approach to such a textbook quite differently than had been done before. Rather than organizing the textbook by linguistic level (phonology, morphology, syntax, etc.) or by period (Old English, Middle English, etc.), I organized it by approach, such as generative, inferential-based, sociohistorical, and psycholinguistic approaches to historical linguistics. This allowed us to highlight some recent and ongoing trends in the fields. I was able to call upon some of the foremost international proponents in these different areas.

MK: You have spent your entire academic career in the English Department (now English Language and Literatures Department) at UBC. What has this been like? What brought you to UBC in the first place?

LB: I came to the English Department at UBC directly upon completing my PhD in 1981 at Berkeley. I was promoted to full professor in 1995 and remained at UBC for my entire career (forty-two years, retiring in July 2023). While in North America it is more customary than in Europe to remain at one institution for one's entire career, it is still somewhat uncommon. The English Department at UBC had established an English Language Major in the mid-1970s (even before a Linguistics Department existed), primarily under the direction of Fred Bowers. At the time, Berkeley was one of the very few places in the United States that had an English language emphasis at the doctoral level. For that reason, there was almost a hiring conduit between the two universities; I was one of at least four Berkeley graduates who were hired over the years. I was extremely fortunate to become part of a thriving English language program at UBC, which allowed me the luxury of teaching undergraduate courses directly in my areas of interest (structure of English, history of English, English traditional grammar, stylistics, corpus linguistics, language myths) and graduate seminars in topics closely aligned with my research (tense and aspect in the history of English, pragmatic markers, grammaticalization, the development of discourse structures, etc.). It was a really rich teaching environment.

MK: What have been the highlights of your career?

LB: I think that the highlight of my career has been my interactions with a large international network of scholars working on the history of English and my participation in scholarly conferences held all over the world (but primarily in

Europe). I have been fortunate to travel to academic conferences in Austria, Belgium, England, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Scotland, Spain, and Sweden as well as Japan—and count as colleagues and friends (and sometimes co-authors and co-editors) scholars in many of these countries. The number of scholars specializing in the history of English in North America is in comparison to Europe rather small, but since 2000 we have held biannual conferences under the auspices of SHEL (Studies in the History of the English Language), which is holding its thirteenth conference in October 2024. It is very encouraging that “The History of the English Language (HEL)” page on Facebook has nearly 1000 people, and brings together American, Canadian, European, Japanese, and other scholars world-wide. That’s a substantial number of people, and a positive thing.

MK: Outside your core areas of study (aspect/discourse-pragmatics/grammaticalization and lexicalization/composite predicates), you have published on a number of other topics. How did you come up with these topics?

LB: I have sorted the articles listed on my webpage into a number of different categories (see <https://blogs.ubc.ca/laurelbrinton/publications/articles-and-chapter/>). In addition to my core areas of work, I have also published a number of articles on linguistic stylistics, on Canadian English, and, most recently, on intensifiers. The linguistic stylistic work grew out of my graduate literary studies, sometimes combined with my focus on aspect and tense. For example, when teaching poetry to a first-year class, I became fascinated with the complex set of aspectual distinctions expressed in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129 (one famous line is “had, having, and in quest to have”). Probably during my leisure-time reading, Charlotte Brontë’s use of the historical present piqued my interest. The concept of diagrammatic iconicity, which I addressed in a number of publications, was at the heart of my treatment of rhetorical figures and of Chaucerian prose. And a graduate class with Banfield (*Unspeaking sentences*, 1982) led to a lasting interest in free indirect style and two publications on this form.

My work on Canadian English stems from a number of years of work on the second edition of the *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles* (2017) (<https://www.dchp.ca/dchp2/>), which was undertaken in my department. (The third edition is in progress.)

Recently, I have become interested in the history of intensifiers in English, and this grows from my grammaticalization focus.

Finally, some of the topics—such as a paper on “interjection-based delocutive verbs” (Brinton 2015)—don’t fit easily into any category and cannot be traced back to any specific event or topic, but like the choice of many of the pragmatic markers I study, they are often a matter of chance, with a particular word or expression catching my attention and evoking my scholarly interest.

MK: In the midst of all your research, teaching, and supervision, have you had any time for hobbies or other free-time activities? I know you attend Zumba classes on Saturdays!

LB: I do have a number of leisure-time activities, including hiking and walking, traveling, art appreciation, gardening, reading, cooking, and fitness classes. But the free time provided by retirement is impressing upon me the need to develop some new activities, to revive some old activities (sewing?, piano playing?), and to involve myself in more volunteer activities. I am rather newly retired, and I'm told it takes some time to settle into a retirement routine.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Merja Kytö  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6988-4498>

References

- Aijmer, Karin. 1987. Oh and ah in English conversation. In Willem Meijs (ed.), *Corpus linguistics and beyond*, 61-86. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Algeo, John. 1995. Having a look at the expanded predicate. In Bas Aarts & Charles F. Meyer (eds.), *The verb in contemporary English: Theory and description*, 203-217. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Banfield, Ann. 1982. *Unspeakable sentences: Narration and representation in the language of fiction*. Boston, MA: Routledge.
- Bergs, Alexander & Laurel J. Brinton (eds.). 2012. *English historical linguistics: An international handbook* (Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft, 34.1-34.2). Berlin & New York, NY: De Gruyter Mouton. (Reprinted in 5 vols. 2017).
- Bosworth, Joseph. 1898. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Edited and enlarged by T. Northcote Toller. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 1980. *What ho, lo, list, yes, indeed: Finding a translation of Beowulf for the freshman*. Paper presented at the Old English Colloquium Conference, Berkeley, CA.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 1988a. *The development of English aspectual systems: Aspectualizers and post-verbal particles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (digitally reprinted in 2009).
- Brinton, Laurel J. 1988b. *Y'know what?: Hwæt as a discourse marker in Old English*. Paper presented at the Old English Colloquium Conference, Berkeley, CA.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 1990. The stylistic function of ME *gan* reconsidered. In Sylvia M. Adamson, Vivien A. Law, Nigel Vincent & Susan Wright (eds.), *Papers from the fifth international conference on English historical linguistics*, 31-53. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 1996a. Attitudes toward increasing segmentalization in English: Complex and phrasal verbs in English. *Journal of English Linguistics* 24(3). 186-205.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 1996b. *Pragmatic markers in English: Grammaticalization and discourse functions*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2000. *The structure of modern English: A linguistic introduction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Brinton, Laurel J. 2001. Historical discourse analysis. In Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen & Heidi E. Hamilton (eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis*, 138-160. Oxford & Malden, MA: Blackwell. (2nd edn. 2015).
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2002. Grammaticalization versus lexicalization reconsidered: On the late use of temporal adverbs. In Teresa Fanego, María José López-Couso & Javier Pérez-Guerra (eds.), *English historical syntax and morphology: Selected papers from 11 ICEHL*, 67-97. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2006. Pathways in the development of pragmatic markers in English. In Ans van Kemenade & Bettelou Los (eds.), *The handbook of the history of the English language*, 307-334. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2008. *The comment clause in English: Syntactic origins and pragmatic development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Issued in paperback 2011).
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2010. Discourse markers. In Andreas H. Jucker & Irma Taavitsainen (eds.), *Historical pragmatics*, 285-314. Berlin & New York, NY: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2011. The grammaticalization of complex predicates. In Heiko Narrog & Bernd Heine (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of grammaticalization*, 559-569. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2012. New perspectives, theories and methods: Lexicalization. In Alexander Bergs & Laurel J. Brinton (eds.), *English Historical Linguistics*, vol. 2, 1577-1598. Berlin & New York, NY: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2015. Interjection-based delocutive verbs in the history of English. In Irma Taavitsainen, Merja Kytö, Claudia Claridge & Jeremy Smith (eds.), *Developments in English: Expanding electronic evidence*, 140-161. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brinton, Laurel J. (ed.). 2017a. *English historical linguistics: Approaches and perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2017b. *The evolution of pragmatic markers in English: Pathways of change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brinton, Laurel J. 2023. *Pragmatics in the history of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brinton, Laurel J. Forthcoming. The development of pragmatic markers: Pathways and processes. In Joan Beal (ed.), *New Cambridge history of the English language*, vol. 3: *Change, transmission and ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brinton, Laurel J. & Minoji Akimoto (eds.). 1999. *Collocational and idiomatic aspects of composite predicates in the history of English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brinton, Laurel J. & Leslie K. Arnovick. 2006. *The English language: A linguistic history*. Toronto: Oxford University Press. (2nd edn. 2011, 3rd edn. 2016).
- Brinton, Laurel J. & Donna M. Brinton. 2010. *The linguistic structure of modern English*. 2nd revised edition of *The structure of modern English: A linguistic introduction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brinton, Laurel J. & Elizabeth Closs Traugott. 2005. *Lexicalization and language change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Claridge, Claudia & Leslie K. Arnovick. 2010. Pragmaticalisation and discursisation. In Andreas H. Jucker & Irma Taavitsainen (eds.), *Historical pragmatics*, 165-192. Berlin & New York, NY: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*. 2017. <https://www.dchp.ca/dchp2/>.
- Diewald, Gabriele. 2006. Discourse particles and modal particles as grammatical elements. In Kerstin Fischer (ed.), *Approaches to discourse particles*, 403-425. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

- Diewald, Gabriele. 2011. Pragmaticalization (defined) as grammaticalization of discourse functions. *Linguistics* 49(2). 365-390.
- Enkvist, Nils Erik. 1972. Old English adverbial *þa*—an action marker? *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 73(1). 90-96.
- Enkvist, Nils Erik. 1986. More about the textual functions of the Old English adverbial *þa*. In Dieter Kastovsky & Aleksander Szwedek (eds.), *Linguistics across historical and geographical boundaries: In honour of Jacek Fisiak on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday*, vol. 1, 301-309. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Enkvist, Nils Erik & Brita Wårvik. 1987. Old English *þa*, temporal chains, and narrative structure. In Anna Giacalone Ramat, Onofrio Carruba & Giuliano Bernini (eds.), *Papers from the 7th international conference on historical linguistics*, 221-237. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Fludernik, Monika. 1995. Middle English *þo* and other narrative discourse markers. In Andreas H. Jucker (ed.), *Historical pragmatics*, 359-392. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Fraser, Bruce. 1986. Pragmatic formatives. In Joseph E. Emonds, Bruce Fraser & Arnold M. Zwicky (eds.), *Indiana Linguistics Club twentieth anniversary volume*, 67-83. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Linguistics Club.
- Fraser, Bruce. 1988. Types of English discourse markers. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 38(1). 19-33.
- Freed, Alice F. 1979. *The semantics of English aspectual complementation*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Healey, Antonette diPaolo, Ashley Crandell Amos & Angus Cameron (eds.). 2018. *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Heine, Bernd, Ulrike Claudi & Friederike Hünemeyer. 1991. *Grammaticalization: A conceptual framework*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Heine, Bernd, Gunther Kaltenböck, Tania Kuteva & Haiping Long. 2021. *The rise of discourse markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hopper, Paul J. 1979. Some observations on the typology of focus and aspect in narrative language. *Studies in Language* 3(1). 37-64.
- Jucker, Andreas H. (ed.). 1995. *Historical pragmatics: Pragmatic developments in the history of English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lehmann, Christian. 1982. *Thoughts on grammaticalization*. München: Lincom Europa.
- Lehmann, Christian. 1985. Grammaticalization: Synchronic variation and diachronic change. *Lingua e stile* 20. 303-318.
- Lenker, Ursula. 2007. Review of Brinton & Traugott (2005). *Anglia* 125(3). 501-503.
- Lewis, Robert E., John Reidy, Sherman M. Kuhn & Hans Kurath (eds.). 1952-2001. *Middle English Dictionary*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Longacre, Robert E. 1976. 'Mystery' particles and affixes. In Salikoko S. Mufwene, Carol A. Walker & Sanford B. Steever (eds.), *Papers from the twelfth regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 468-475. Chicago, IL: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Mitchell, Bruce. 1985. *Old English syntax*, 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mustanoja, Tauno F. 1960. *A Middle English syntax. I: Parts of speech*. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique.
- Östman, Jan-Ola. 1981. "You know": A discourse-functional view. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn. 1989. Prepared by J. A. Simpson & E. S. C. Weiner. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. New York, NY: Longman.

- Rissanen, Matti, Merja Kytö, Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, Matti Kilpiö, Saara Nevanlinna, Irma Taavitsainen, Terttu Nevalainen & Helena Raumolin-Brunberg. 1991. See The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts.
- Schiffirin, Deborah. 1987. *Discourse markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Carlota S. 1983. A theory of aspectual choice. *Language* 59(3). 479-501.
- The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts. 1991. Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki. Compiled by Matti Rissanen (Project leader), Merja Kytö (Project secretary); Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, Matti Kilpiö (Old English); Saara Nevanlinna, Irma Taavitsainen (Middle English); Terttu Nevalainen, Helena Raumolin-Brunberg (Early Modern English).
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 1982. From propositional to textual and expressive meanings: Some semantic-pragmatic aspects of grammaticalization. In Winfred P. Lehmann & Yakov Malkiel (eds.), *Perspectives on historical linguistics*, 245-271. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 1988. Pragmatic strengthening and grammaticalization. In Shelley Axmaker, Annie Jaiser & Helen Singmaster (eds.), *Proceedings of the fourteenth annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 406-416. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Linguistics Society.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 1989. On the rise of epistemic meanings in English: An example of subjectification in semantic change. *Language* 65(1). 31-55.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs & Richard B. Dasher. 2002. *Regularity in semantic change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Venezky, Richard L. & Antonette diPaolo Healey. 1980. *A microfiche concordance to Old English*. The Dictionary of Old English Project, University of Toronto.
- Verkuyl, Hendrik Jacob. 1972. *On the compositional nature of the aspects*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Visser, Fredericus Theodorus. 1969-1973. *An historical syntax of the English language*. 4 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Wårvik, Brita. 1990. On grounding in English narratives. In Sylvia M. Adamson, Vivien A. Law, Nigel Vincent & Susan Wright (eds.), *Papers from the fifth international conference on English historical linguistics*, 559-575. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Wårvik, Brita. 1995. The ambiguous adverbial/conjunctions *þa* and *þonne* in Middle English: A discourse-pragmatic study of *then* and *when* in early saints' lives. In Andreas H. Jucker (ed.), *Historical Pragmatics*, 345-357. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Wischer, Ilse. 2000. Grammaticalization versus lexicalization: 'methinks' there is some confusion. In Olga Fischer, Anette Rosenbach & Dieter Stein (eds.), *Pathways of change: Grammaticalization in English*, 355-370. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Author Biography

Merja Kytö is a Professor Em. of English Language at Uppsala University, Sweden. Her main research interests include variation and change in the English language, present and past. She has published extensively on the morpho-syntax and sociopragmatics of Early and Late Modern English, with special reference to speech-related language.